**What are author’s notes?**

Author’s notes are just that—notes form the author about his/her paper. They introduce the paper, describe its composition processes, and lay the groundwork for response from peers and/or the instructor. Author’s notes might be anywhere from two paragraphs to a page and a half in length. Although they might seem, at first impression, to be useful only with drafts in progress, author’s notes can be very helpful to writers and reader at any stage of the process.

Author’s notes provide many benefits for both instructor and student. They can help the writer become more active as a participant in an ongoing writing dialogue about the writing process. Author’s notes help readers focus their responses to your papers, tuning those responses to your particular needs.

**What should you include in your author’s notes?**

Basically, there are three main elements—the questions that follow are suggestions to help get you thinking.

1. **The history of the piece**—How did you come up with the idea? What influenced your writing? What decisions did you make as you wrote the piece? How did you decide how to approach it? What did you change as you wrote it? What were you trying to show the reader? How does this draft compare to earlier versions? What problems have you encountered and how have you attempted to solve them? What challenges did you face in terms of genre, form or organization?
2. **Your evaluation of the piece—**What do you think of this paper? What do you think is working well in this piece? What lines or parts of the paper do you like? What is frustrating you? What do you think really needs work? What problems have you been unable to solve? IF you think about the kinds of pieces you have read in this and other settings, what possibilities can you envision for this piece?
3. **The response you would find most helpful—**What response do you want to the paper? What do you want to know from your readers?

**What *aren’t* author’s notes?**

Author’s notes are NOT apologies, clarifications of what is unclear in the paper, defenses of your paper against possible criticism, complaints about the assignment or process or printer malfunctions. In order to usefully promote good writing and critical thinking practices, author’s notes should not succumb to these temptations. They should be more than summaries of the paper they accompany. They should help readers to understand your writing process and your intent and should start a conversation with the reader about your paper. What do readers need to know in order to be most helpful to you in response? The best author’s notes open up issues for readers to discuss in responses and expose vulnerabilities in your paper. Open yourself up to receive good response to your work.

**Some ways you might use author’s notes:**

* Ask Questions
  + Ask the reader questions about the effects of the text.
  + Ask specific questions about specific passages.
    - Examples:
      * I wasn’t sure about where I decided to start the piece. How does the beginning set up what follows?
      * I’m not sure my ending works. I don’t want to tell too much, but do I leave the reader confused?
* Discuss the process of composition/research/revisions
  + Example:
    - I had written this completely differnly, but then decided it was too personal. I attach both versions. What do you think?
* Explain what you were trying to do:
  + Example:
    - In this paper, I want to show how I came to realize that I was wasting my life with this group of friends I was hanging around with, but I don’t want to just tell the reader that.
* Explain how you understood the assignment:
  + Example:
    - I thought we were supposed to write about a personal experiences—I didn’t think it had to be a story exactly, but it should at least relate an experience.
* Explain what resources you have used to complete the assignment:
  + Example:
    - I took my draft to the University Writing Center and got help on my introduction and conclusion from a consultant. My roommate proofread the latest draft for me.